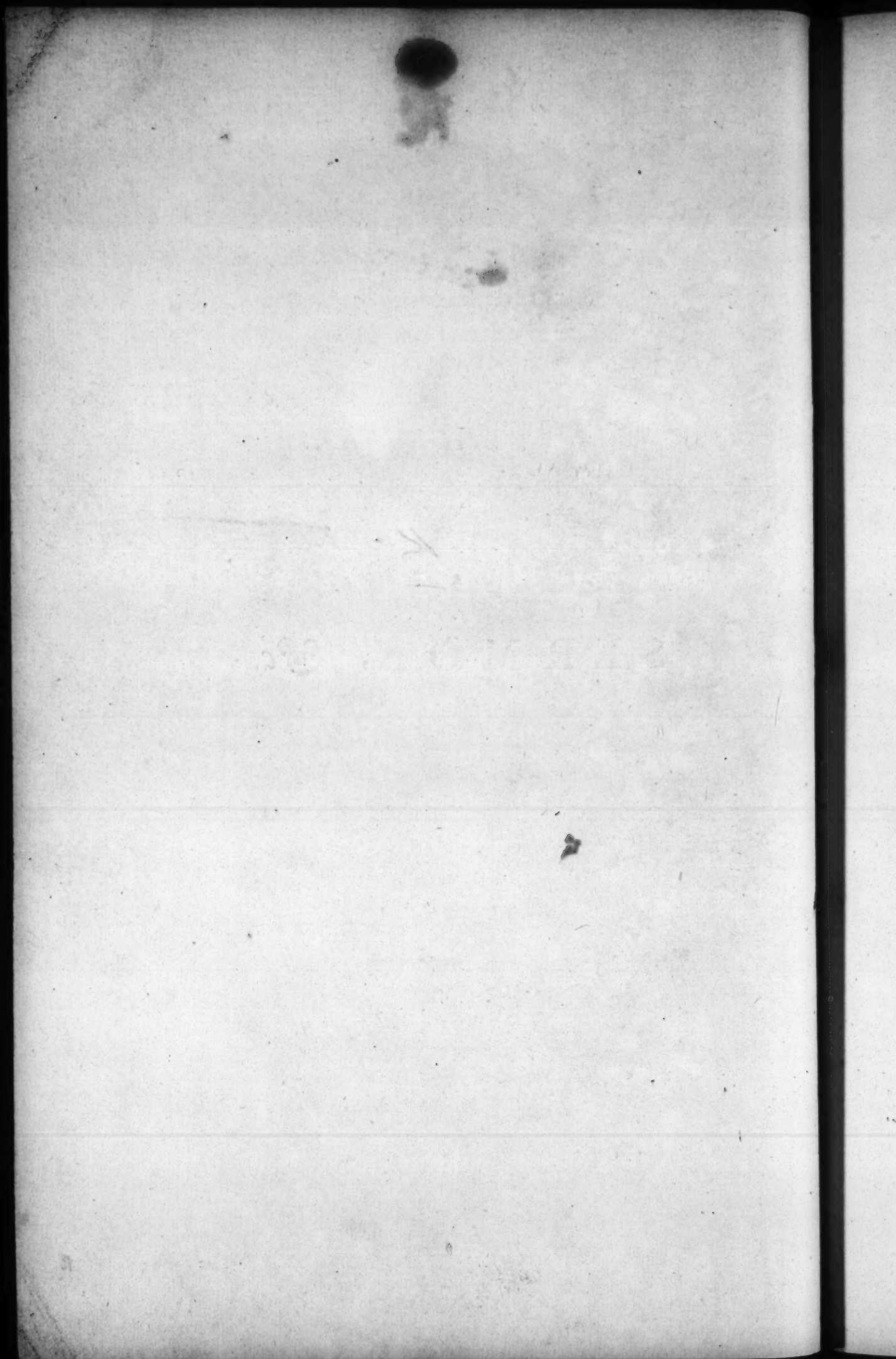


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A

S E R M O N, &c.



A

S E R M O N.

On JOHN vii. 17.

Delivered, in the Parish Church

OF

SUTTON COLDFIELD;

January 30, 1791.

BY THE REV. F. ^KBLICK, A. M. Curate. &

LATE OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE OXFORD.

WITH THE

L E T T E R S

That have passed between Him, and

THE REV. JOHN RILAND, A. M. Rector, *of Yoxall*

Respecting it.

BIRMINGHAM,

PRINTED BY THOMAS PEARSON.

MDCCXCI.



TO
Sir Robert and Lady Lawley,

TO
WM. TAYLER, ESQ. WARDEN,
J. DUNCUMB, ESQ. and W. WEBB, GENT.
CAPITAL BURGESSES,

OF
SUTTON COLDFIELD;
AND
The principal Inhabitants of the Parish,

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE IS

WITH THEIR ASSENT,

DEDICATED

BY THEIR MOST RESPECTFUL,

MOST OBLIGED, AND OBEDIENT

HUMBLE SERVANT,

FRA. BLICK.



THE
ADDRESS.

MY GOOD FRIENDS,

UNFEIGNEDLY reluctant as I was to comply with your request, and to enter upon a public vindication of my principles and conduct in my ministry; I am now compelled to do it. My Rector says, that he has thought it his duty to bring what he calls this seeming charge against me, but what I cannot but call a direct and absolute one, that “ he and many other persons remember too well possibly to be mistaken, “ that I have in this and other discourses “ delivered doctrines contrary to the sacred “ Scriptures, the church of England, and “ the

THE ADDRESS.

“ the promise I solemnly made in the presence of God at my Ordination.” An assertion that I shudder at, and which, if founded in fact would expose me deservedly to public censure. He adds “ that unless I submit the Sermon to his perusal minutely to examine it, or print it, *he is driven to say*, that I have preached doctrines *totally inconsistent with, or contradictory to* the scriptures, and the doctrines of the church, which I have solemnly engaged to maintain, and ruinous to the souls of those, who heard and believe them.” I therefore adopt the latter mode, and both the Sermon and the Letters shall lie publicly before you; and I hope and trust, that (after your private declarations in my favour) you will by some public testimony express your approbation, not only of my principles in this particular discourse, but of the general tenor of my doctrines and conduct in the ministry. I have now lived among you several years, experiencing many instances of personal affection, and flattered by numerous testimonies of applause, and I have

THE ADDRESS

have maintained, or believe I have, that, according to the doctrines of the Scriptures, and of our Church in her eleventh Article, no man was justified by his own merit, or his own works, but by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone, and that though no man could hope to obtain that eternal reward which was purchased for him by the blood of Christ, and by the satisfaction he made, except by faith in him, yet have I always strongly endeavoured to inculcate that no one could have that practical faith, unless he shewed it by a moral, holy, and virtuous life, which was pleasing and acceptable to God. *See the twelfth Article.*

These were the sentiments, that in conjunction with your late most respected and most revered Pastor, I long endeavoured to enforce. Under his patronage I almost began the office of my ministry. He set me a bright example of diligence in his vocation, of rectitude in his conduct, and of piety in his devotion. He was frequently pleased to express an approbation of my endeavours in
the

THE ADDRESS.

the performance of my duty ; and under his instruction those sentiments of religion were matured, which I had early imbibed. And on the mournful occasion of his decease, I declared in the face of the congregation, that the doctrines he had held were such as the Scriptures contained, and such as my heart approved ; and that his conduct should be an example to me.

Before I bid a final adieu to this subject, I must add, that if this address to you should not be followed by some mark of your approbation, I can no more with satisfaction, enter the church of Sutton as a minister, but shall retire with the hope, that as my errors in point of doctrine, whatever they may be, have not been wilful ; I may, when the appointed time shall come, repose with my late esteemed Friend, in the bosom of our God.

To you, my Parishioners and my Friends, I am truly grateful for all your kindness and attention. To your candour, your good sense,

THE ADDRESS.

sense, and your knowledge of the Scriptures, and the doctrines of our church, I commit myself, hoping that no prejudice or partiality will bias your judgment in so important a consideration, to pronounce otherwise than as the glorious truths of the gospel require.

To those particular and anxious friends, who so kindly and voluntarily interest themselves in my favour, and have offered to promote a subscription for the publication. I return my most cordial thanks, and hope that my gratitude and affection will be shewn in the future conduct of my life.

F. BLICK.

Sutton Coldfield,
Feb. 22, 1791.

POST-

POSTSCRIPT.

HAVING remarked when I sent the preceding address to the Printer's, that I could no more enter the Church of Sutton with satisfaction, as a Minister, without some testimony of the approbation of those, who for so many years had heard and known me; I think it now as necessary to add, that the very liberal and respectable subscription, that has been entered into for the publication of the Sermon, by almost all the principal Inhabitants of the Parish who heard it, by the others who, at the time of its delivery, did not attend the Church, by the neighbouring Gentry and Clergy, and even by the President of St. John's (my Tutor) and the College of which I was formerly a Member, is to me the most flattering, the most honourable, and most satisfactory testimony, that the doctrines, I have so long held in this place, have not been deemed contradictory to those of the Scriptures, or of our Church; and that my conduct in the vocation, whereunto I have been called, has not deserved the censure, but on the contrary gained the esteem of those who have heard and known me. Returning then, as I do, my most sincere thanks to those respectable Subscribers, who have honoured the publication with their names, I determine, never more to set pen to paper on this subject.

F. B.

March 19, 1791.

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CHAPTER I

The first part of the book is devoted to a general survey of the subject. It begins with a definition of the term, and then proceeds to a discussion of its history and development. The author then turns to a consideration of the various theories and methods which have been employed in the study of the subject. He then discusses the results of his own researches, and finally concludes with a summary of the main points of the book.

LETTER I.

FROM THE REV. MR. RILAND, TO THE REV. MR. BLICK.

SIR,

AS there were, in your Sermon of yesterday, various particulars, which, with many persons, I find, but especially with myself, want an explanation, I call upon you for that explanation, that we may know what your meaning was, both as to *things** and *persons*. And, in the mean time, that I may not mistake your words in the Sermon, I ask for a perusal of it. Please to send it by the Bearer to

Your Friend,

And Servant in the Gospel,

Parsonage,
Jan. 31.

J. RILAND.

* Those words that are in Italics were scored under in the original Letter.

THE REV. MR. BLICK'S ANSWER.

Feb. 1, 1791.

REV. SIR,

I Own myself much surprized at the letter I have received from you last night, and sorry to find that any particulars in my Sermon on Sunday should need an explanation, or be supposed to contain any secret meaning, as both the language and doctrines I endeavoured to render as plain as possible. To you, Sir, however, I am ready to give any explanation that may be required, but to no other person, except I am first acquainted with them by name. With respect to my meaning as to *persons*, I am perfectly unconscious of any, as I positively aver I neither made nor meant any personal reference whatever; and as to *things* or doctrine, I am astonished they should need any further explanation, for the sentiments were such, as about seven years ago I delivered in the same church, and to the same audience, and for a great part in the same words, and such, as I have been told, have had a happy effect, been much approved of by the congregation at large, and such as I have been actually thanked for. The purport of the doctrine as contained in one sentence, which you must have heard me repeat towards the close of my discourse, was, that
without

without holiness, without purity of manners, and the practice of the moral duties, no one could be entitled to that reward, which the merits and atonement of Christ had purchased for him; and this I hope and believe, is strictly conformable to the doctrine of the sacred scriptures, and the church of England. Your desire, that I will send you my Sermon, I must beg leave to refuse. If, Sir, there are any passages you can refer to, that you wish to see, or should request any further explanation of any particular points, those shall be instantly complied with, but indeed to send it verbatim, if it was not contrary to my inclination and constant resolution, is probably in this case out of my power. It was, Sir, my fervent prayer at the delivery, that the discourse might by the grace of God, conduce to the edification and amendment of life of my hearers, and I still pray that it may be so, and that our joint labours may always tend to instruct the flock in the true light of the gospel, and may help them forward in the right way that leadeth unto salvation.

I am, Sir, with respect,

Your Friend and fellow Servant in Christ,

F. BLICK.

THE REV. MR. RILAND'S SECOND LETTER.

Feb. 5, 1791.

AS I cannot procure from you a perusal of your Sermon, I must speak to it, in the best manner my memory will enable me; and if I mistake your meaning, as expressed in your words, the Sermon must then itself point out the particulars, wherein I do mistake it. I am sure I remember the matter, though not sure that I remember the manner.

1. I first observe, That, in this said Sermon on John vii. 17. You repeatedly, expressly, and very plainly (and so that your meaning could not possibly be mistaken, if common words express common sense) spake so in favour of the light of *nature*, of *reason*, of man's *capability* to teach him his duty, and of his *power* to do it, as that, of consequence, the particular teaching of God's *spirit*, the particular direction of God's *word*, and the particular influence of God's *grace*, in an experimental manner, inwardly in the soul, were unavoidably, by your argument, rendered needless. This we all well remember, and have no doubt of. Here, then, I ask you, Whether this be the doctrine of your Bible? See the contrary in Mat. xi. 27, and xvi. 17. 1 Cor. ii. 9—

16. John vi. 45. I ask again, is this the doctrine of your *church*, of the doctrine you pray, and the doctrine you have subscribed, and solemnly, at your ordination, engaged to preach? Here see the 10th *article*, and the 18th, also several of the *collects*; select parts of the *homilies*, and of the *Ordination-office*. I ask how is all this to be reconciled? My letter comes to you as a letter of *inquiry*.

2. You also taught, in your Sermon, to this purpose, in a manner too plain to be mistaken by us, in the congregation, that man, by *moral conduct*, and doing his *duty*, as it is called, in keeping the *commandments*, as you think, and doing the will of God thereby, would be acceptable to God, on *that account*; though he might differ, from some sects and parties, in *opinion*, as to some *mysterious points*, which were of no material signification. This we well remember.

But, I enquire, how is this reconciled with Gal. ii. 15—21. and chap. iii. throughout with Rom. iii. 19—to the end? And how also with the 10th. the 11th. the 13th. and the 18th. articles of our church, which you have bound your conscience to preach? I add, here, in this case, by this doctrine of your's you preach the *law* for *salvation*, when St. Paul preached it for *condemnation*, and so you go directly counter to his teaching in 2 Cor. iii. 5—9. and to his experience, in Phil. iii. 6—9. Here I am driven to

ask, which is right, and which is wrong, you or St. Paul?

3. In your Sermon you also very plainly spoke against a particular *system* of *doctrines*, which were, as you gave us to understand, respecting them, *mysterious points*, and as but matters of *opinions* and *disputation*, held by particular *parties* and *sects*, as if held in contradiction to man's doing his duty, by moral conduct, in keeping the law. When I read, consider the meaning, and observe what we ministers are to learn to be, and learn to do, from Mat. xiii. 11. 1 Cor. iv. 1, 2. Ephes. iii. 8. and Col. iv. 3. and at the same time, what we, consistent with these scriptures, call ourselves, as we pray, in the words of the 3d collect in Advent, I am compelled to ask what is your meaning, and how will you reconcile the meaning with the Bible, and the church?

In these three capital particulars you seem to me, in your preaching your Sermon on John vii. 17. to have gone directly contrary to the scriptures of God, and the doctrines of the church of England, which you have subscribed, and have bound your conscience, solemnly, in God's presence, to preach. If I have mistaken your meaning, by misunderstanding your words, I beg you to set me right, and shall be heartily glad for you to do so. I must add to what I have here said respecting this your Sermon on John vii. 17. That you taught the same capitally-

tally-erroneous doctrine, in your Sermon about three months back, on Mat. xxii. 35—I well remember it, though I have said nothing to you about it, being willing to wait, hoping God would teach you to see what you then saw not. But both your Sermons are of a piece, and, as it seems to me, both are *fundamentally erroneous*.

At this manner of my addressing myself to you, and on my bringing such a seeming charge against you, as you see here, I can easily imagine you may be much surprised, and with it possibly much grieved. I can only say, my meaning is not to hurt, but to profit you. But, upon this, should you be desirous, as I hope you will be, to ask the question, how it comes to pass, that a minister in the church of England should preach in a way so wide of the truth, as of the Scriptures, so of his church, I will tell you exactly and truly, viz. It is for want of having the truth of the gospel-salvation *known* in the soul, by *divine teaching*; it is because, in this case, the preacher himself has no *experience* of the truth, as it is in Jesus, in his *heart*. If we know not gospel-salvation for our own souls, how can we preach it for the souls of others? If we *have* no experience, we can *preach* none. For this reason we preach error instead of truth, the law instead of the gospel. The hearers learn nothing, for they are taught nothing; they receive no truth, for none is given them;

and they go back from the church no better than they came to it. The blind lead the blind; and BOTH are in the way of falling into the ditch. This, Sir, is your case; and it once was mine. When I was ordained to the Curacy of Sutton, and was a preacher there from Sep. — 59 to July 61. I was a preacher of error, and no preacher of truth; taught the law, and not the gospel, for salvation. And why was I so fundamentally erroneous in my preaching for the souls of *others*, but because I was as much so in *my own*? I knew nothing of sin, of the law, of the Saviour, of the gospel in my own soul; I knew no pardon of sin, no acceptance with God, no regeneration, no conversion, no change of heart, nor alteration in life. I thought I was right, and knew not that I was wrong; built my own hopes of heaven on the sand instead of the rock, and taught others to do the same; so foolish was I, and ignorant! In July — 61 God opened my eyes to behold the wonderful things out of his law; and then He gave me to experience John vi. 45. On that text, in August, I began to preach the truth I knew then experimentally; preaching which God blessed to the saving of souls, but no preaching before this, did He ever bless. And glory, glory to his most gracious and wonderful Name, he has kept me from that time to this, thirty years, in the same way of preaching, to the salvation of many souls, as I have cause to believe.

Thus,

Thus, Sir, I have given you my experience, agreeable to that saying of the Psalmist, "Come all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul." God grant that your experience may be like mine; that you may go and do likewise; and then we shall both of us, like the apostle St. Paul, who gives his experience in Acts ix. shall preach the faith, which once we destroyed; and the people will glorify God in us, as they did in him.

And now, Sir, should it please our God so to accompany, and so to follow with the teaching of his spirit, what I have endeavoured to teach by his word, to the saving good of your soul, and so also to the saving good of the souls of the hearers, by your preaching to them an *experienced gospel*, O how will you bless God, first in time, and then in eternity, that you ever heard truth from *my* mouth, and read truth from *my* pen! May he cause this thought to lie as a pleasing influencing weight upon your mind!

I do solemnly declare as in the presence of God, before whom I am to stand in Judgment, at the last day, to give an account of my having thus addressed myself to you, that it is the grief of my heart to make such an address to you; but that duty to my great Divine Master, duty to my soul, duty to your's, and duty to the people's, does, conscientiously engage me to do it. What I have no doubt

doubt in the world is my place and duty to do, that I believe I ever have done, and that I am fixed I ever will do, the Lord being my helper.

I make not the subject of this letter a subject of conversation with any one whatever, out of my own house; nor with all in it. This matter, at present however, lies between me and you alone, before our God.

I wish you to take a little *time* to ponder this serious, very serious business. Do not answer in a hurry; read, and read again; think, and think again, before you write, or speak once. You had better let a *week* pass before you either write, or speak to me on the subject. And I had rather you would converse with me than write to me; unless you quite prefer the latter to the former mode of answer.

Now, Sir, let me beg of you to be earnest with God in prayer to shew whether I am right, and you wrong, or you right, and I wrong (for one is fundamentally, and not speculatively) and to pray the prayer for yourself at home, as well as read it in the church for others. That it may please thee to illuminate all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, with *true knowledge* and *understanding* of thy word; and that both by their preaching and living they may *set it forth*, and *shew it* accordingly."

I must

I must add, that I send you this because I am concerned, and not unconcerned for your soul, and its salvation, for the people, and their salvation. Did I disregard you, and them, I would let you alone. I know, and God knows, how I write this Letter; may you know, and he know how you receive it!

THE REV. MR. BLICK'S ANSWER,

TO THE

REV. MR. RILAND'S SECOND LETTER.

February 12, 1791.

REV. SIR,

HAVING considered your letter again and again, I am indeed both surprized and grieved at not only the seeming, but the direct and absolute charge you have brought against me,—surprized at the unexpectedness of it, and grieved that any minister of God should bring so heavy and solemn a charge against another upon so slight, or rather I should say upon no foundation at all. Besides, I find, though in your last address toward the
close,

close, you say, the subject of it lies between you and me alone and before our God, yet, that I am arraigned before the tribunal of other judges, for in your first letter you say "many persons," and in the former part of your last more than once, "we all well remember." I am therefore the more sorry, that others also should charge me upon so unjust grounds with breaking the solemn promise, I made in the presence of God at my ordination. However, Sir, I will only add, that as my belief in the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures, and in such as are professed by the church of England, has been from serious and mature consideration long fixed, and as neither inclination leads me, nor the time allotted to the avocations necessary for the support of my family allows me, to enter into any theological controversies, I will therefore reply in as few words as possible to your long letter. You first charge me with having spoken so in favour of "the light of nature, of reason, of man's capability to teach him his duty, and of his power to do it, as that of consequence, the teaching of God's spirit, the direction of God's word, and the influence of God's grace, were unavoidably rendered needless." This, Sir, notwithstanding you, or any one may imagine you remember so well, as "not possibly to be mistaken, if common words express common sense," I yet beg leave positively to deny. I only declared

clared that the existence of a God was manifest by the light of nature and of reason, and that men judging according to the law engraven in their hearts of the knowledge of good and evil, and then performing that law or will of God to the best of their power, were best able to judge of any doctrines, whether they were from God or not. And for this I appeal to the text. Again, what you observe about my declaration with respect to sects, or parties, or mysterious points is equally void of foundation. My words were, for I have now revised my sermon, that "at the great and solemn day of decision before the tribunal of God, the question will not be, were you of this sect or of that, were you of this persuasion or of that, but what good have you done? What life have you led? Have you lived according to the best of your knowledge? Have you lived a holy virtuous life? Have you performed the moral duties according to your faith? For these are the grand important points."

To prove this, I only refer to the very first sentence of the liturgy; to Christ's whole sermon on the mount, and to his description of the last judgment in the latter part of the xxv. chap. of St. Matthew. For I, Sir, am not so uncharitable as to condemn every one out of the pale of my own church, nor so presuming as to say that any one will be condemned for thinking differently from myself.

self. I further added indeed, that “doctrines contrary to these weightier matters of the law, were “ ‘as clouds without water, and as stubble carried “ about by the winds.’ And that whoever substituted forms or ceremonies, an over pretended “ sanctity, or a mere talking about religion in the “ stead of that solid piety and virtue,—in the stead “ of that faith in the merits of Christ, which produces righteousness, temperance, and charity, delivered doctrines pernicious and ever sive of the “ very foundation of christianity.”

In consequence, Sir, the whole of your letter, and of your charges being founded on erroneous principles, I wave entering into any further discussion. Indeed, Sir, as it does not become a Curate to enter into controversy with his Rector, and as I am really debarred from allowing time for that purpose, I beg you will believe that my hope of salvation is alone founded in the faith in Christ Jesus, according as it is set forth in the Scriptures and in the church of England, and that I trust I never did, nor ever shall hold doctrines contrary thereto. I beg you will believe that I give ample credit to the good intention and good wishes of your heart for me and my soul's welfare, and I decline any further correspondence or conversation upon this subject, for fear offence should arise, and for the sake of peace.

If,

If, Sir, however, what I have here declared does not gain credit with you, but you should still think me so *capitally erroneous* as to hold doctrines directly contrary to the sacred scriptures, and to my solemn promise made in the presence of God (a very, very serious charge, Sir) my only step shall be to comply with the wish and request of almost all the principal inhabitants who heard my Sermon; for, Sir, they have both last week and this, in the persons of Sir Robert Lawley, and the Magistrates requested me to print it, and I must do it, in vindication of myself, and in justice to the Parish, who are by these means obliquely accused of attending for years, not only without censure, but rather with marked approbation as their general petition to you in my favour demonstrated,—to doctrines contrary to the scriptures and *fundamentally* erroneous. Should you persist then, Sir, in a charge of so serious a nature (but I hope better things of you) reluctant, unfeignedly reluctant as I am to meet the public eye, I must step forth in my own vindication and print my Sermon; nor will this be sufficient, I shall think it my duty to lay a copy before the Bishop, together with the letters that have passed. The anxiety of my mind now is not a little, but it does not arise from any doubt of my principles, nor from any consciousness that the doctrines I have held are not perfectly consonant to the scriptures,—No, it
arises

arises from a concern that any disputes should occur between myself and you, between two individuals whose end in their public and private exhortations must be the same ; it arises from a concern that any heart-burnings and disputations should now spring up in a parish which has for many years been the seat of happiness, and under your much and generally revered Brother of perfect unity and religious concord. I am too, much hurt that you should suppose (but I hope I mistake your meaning) that I pray not in private as well as in public, or that the petitions of the church, are not the petitions of my heart at home; and especially that you should suppose I do not equally with you, pray to the searcher of all hearts that he will enlighten my mind so to understand his scriptures, and so to perform the office of my ministry, that I may best promote thereby the salvation of my own soul, and of those committed to my care.

But I have done, Sir. I thank you kindly for your declaration of good wishes towards me, and all further correspondence or conversation on this subject ceasing, when I am favoured with your reply, hope we shall yet live together in agreement, and in mutual endeavours to further the salvation of those souls that look to us for assistance and advice.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient humble Servant,

F R A. B L I C K.

THE REV. MR. RILAND'S THIRD LETTER.

SIR,

I Have received your answer to my application to you for an explanation of your Sermon, on John vii. 17. and I find it such as I feared it would be. I am driven to say, you do not attend to the *point in hand*, you do not keep to the *argument* before us. I remarked that your Sermon had in it, such and such doctrines, which appeared to me very inconsistent with, or contradictory to many particular parts of the scriptures, as also to many particular parts of the doctrines of our church; your doctrines I pointed out, then the scriptures, then the articles, the homilies, and ordination-office, and the prayers; observing the great difference between your teaching and their's; I then asked you how you reconciled all this? and to give me an explanation of your Sermon; and my letter was a letter of *inquiry*, not of *charge*. Instead of doing this, you have not said *a word* to those particular scriptures, nor to those particular doctrines of our church. Had you attended to the argument, and argued the point over, like a fair examiner of it, you should

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have

have shewn me the true meaning both of the scriptures and of the church, and then shewed how they fairly proved the truth of your doctrine, which I quoted or referred to, in order to prove the falsity of it. I am therefore by you compelled to apply to you for the *reconciling* and the *explaining* I want. If I have mistaken the sense, and misunderstood the meaning of your sermon, shew me I have, and I will thank you, beg your pardon, and recant what I have said. In order for this, you must either let me have the perusal of your sermon, and then I imagine I shall be able more minutely to point out the great errors in your doctrine; or else, you must *print* it; (and then I will answer it, or recant what I have said; and the public shall judge) if you will do neither of these, then I am driven to say, that in your sermon on John vii. 17. in that also on Mat. xxii. 35, 36. you have preached doctrines totally inconsistent with, or contradictory to the scriptures, and the doctrines of the church, which you have solemnly engaged to maintain instead of opposing. I say again, if I have mistaken the sense of your sermons, and misunderstood their meaning, shew it me from those sermons, and I will thank you, beg your pardon, and recant what I have said.

If you fix to *print* your sermon, it is not unlikely but that I shall send a copy of it immediately to the bishop, and shall to his lordship point out those particular

particular scriptures, and those doctrines of his church, which your's contradict. I am perfectly ready to meet you, with your sermon, at the bishop's.

You name Sir Robert Lawley, and our two Magistrates, and the principal part of the Parishoners; but what is this to the *argument*? However, I am, Sir, ready to meet you with any, or all of them, and before them shew you the errors of your sermons; ruinous to their souls, if they believe, and live and die in the belief of them, as I am fully persuaded before God, and am ready to prove. Now, Sir, read with me, John iii. 20, 21. with Ephes. v. 13.

That you may see a little more of the doctrines of the scriptures, and of our church, when *brought together*, than, possibly, you may have been wont to see, or sufficiently to consider, I send you the inclosed papers. BUT, Sir, BUT, Sir, let me now speak to you in another way, and advise you to take another method, not with me, but with *yourself*, not with my charges, as you call them, just at present; but with your *own soul*; and, leaving me, and the pulpit, and the parish out of your mind, talk thus with yourself, and indulge to something like the following soliloquy;

“How is it, of a truth, with my soul? Is it saved? Am I in a state of acceptance with God?

Has he shewed me my sins, by his convincing spirit, and their pardon by his comforting spirit? Do I see the insufficiency of my own righteousness, to renounce it (like the apostle, in Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9. and the all-sufficiency of the Saviour's to embrace it? Am I so brought into a justified state? Am I, in truth, so born again of God, as that I have been not only outwardly baptized with water, but inwardly renovated by the spiritual new birth, experimentally, knowing a work of grace in my heart? Can I tell what God has done for my soul? Is the gospel, truly, the power of God to my salvation? And do I preach it to others, because I know it myself? Are any sinners brought to salvation by my ministry? Have I any *seals* of my ministry? Have I any evidence that any such will be my joy, and crown of rejoicing in the great day of the Lord Jesus? Are there any of my hearers that will bless God in heaven that ever they heard me on earth? Am I not deceived myself; and deceiving others? Am I sure that I am right in my soul, and as right in my ministry? Am I clearly convinced, that my ministry to others is not delusion to others, as delusion to myself? Can my state bear close examination, and the care of my soul, and ministry, answer well to strict inquiry? O let me pray, as one before me prayed, that I might, after him, "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine

mine my thoughts. Look well, if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Now, my dear Sir, suffer the word of exhortation; and let me beg of you coolly, fairly, and speedily, to enter upon such an examination into the state of your own soul, first, and then for the souls of others, next. Let me persuade you to consider this one solemn point, viz. Your *own soul* is *at stake*; it may be now, or never, with you respecting its salvation; and the souls of many, many others may be at stake also.—I have now said my say; I have delivered my own soul, in attempting to save your's. God, in mercy, grant, the event of my endeavour may, be blessed of him to save you! Amen, Amen.

Says, and prays with his heart,

Your Friend,

And Servant in Christ,

Parsonage,
Feb. 18, 1791.

J. RILAND.

THE REV. MR. BLICK'S ANSWER,

TO THE

REV. MR. RILAND'S THIRD LETTER.

MR. Blick's compliments to Mr. Riland, and informs him that of the two sermons he still thinks so contradictory to the scriptures, and the church; the first, he refers to, on Matt. xxii. 35, was almost a literal extract from one of the excellent Dr. Jortin's Sermons, which the first Divines of our church have so highly recommended, and in whose collection Mr. R. may find it, *that* therefore Mr. B. leaves him to reply to as he may think proper. The other sermon shall be printed together with the letters that have passed.

Feb. 22, 1791.

What is the Price

THE

T H E
S E R M O N.

JOHN vii. 17.

IF ANY MAN WILL DO HIS WILL, HE SHALL KNOW OF
THE DOCTRINE, WHETHER IT BE OF GOD, OR WHE-
THER I SPEAK OF MYSELF *.

THE public teaching of our Saviour; ge-
nerally produced admiration and asto-
nishment, even in those hearers who were not
converted by it. They wondered at the wis-
dom with which he spake, and were surprized
that a person who had never been instructed,
but had been brought up obscurely in the
family of a tradesman should discover such a
superior understanding, such a thorough and
more exact knowledge of the law and the
prophets, than the most learned Scribes had
attained to; this was certainly a most extra-
ordinary circumstance: but the true solution

* In composing this Discourse, I have been much indebted to a
Sermon on the same text already before the public.

of it, Jesus himself gives us in the verse preceding my text, "My doctrine," says he, "is not mine, but his that sent me." i. e. it is not a doctrine of human learning, or of human wisdom, but an immediate emanation from the Deity himself.

Here then an important question arose. How was this declaration supported? How did it appear that Jesus was a messenger immediately sent from heaven, divinely instructed to deliver his doctrine to the world? For if this were true, consequences of the greatest moment depended upon it. And to prove this only two kinds of argument could be brought, and our Saviour insisted upon both. The one an external sign from Heaven confirming what he said; and for this he appealed to the miraculous works which he wrought, demanding belief for their sakes, and also to the evident accomplishments of ancient divine predictions in him. He called upon the Jews to search the Scriptures, as we repeatedly call upon you, to see whether the things we deliver are true or not; for the Jews acknowledged the old Scriptures to be divinely inspired, and Jesus left the question to be decided by their testimony. For, says he, "they are they
" which

“ which testify of me*.” The other argument is taken from the nature and tendency of the doctrine itself. If it be agreeable to the principles of natural religion, and worthy of God as its author; if it aim at the good and the happiness of mankind by giving them just sentiments of the Deity, and of their duty: if it contain the most powerful motives to the practice of piety and every virtue,—this will prepare a well disposed mind to consider impartially, and receive readily the other argument, namely, the external divine attestation, by miracles and prophecy, as plainly shewing the interposition of the power of God to recommend it.

But the prevailing disaffection of men to strict virtue, and their strong prejudices against the purity of its moral precepts, occasioned the grand objections against the christian religion, and were the real cause of their not believing it. Thus, our Saviour says, “ This is the condemnation that light is come
“ into the world, and men loved darkness
“ rather than light, because their deeds were
“ evil†.” And in the text, “ If any man
“ will *do* his will who sent me, he shall know
“ of the doctrine whether it be of God, or

* John v. 39.

† John iii. 19.

“ whether

“whether I speak of myself.” This is certainly a fair and reasonable issue to put the credit of christianity upon. For if a man be an enemy to God and to righteousness in his mind, by wicked deeds, he cannot be a competent judge. How can such a man assent to a revelation that carries virtue and moral goodness higher than human reason could do without it? How can he assent to it, who is averse from natural religion and virtue itself, even in the degree it is taught by the light of nature? But if any one will examine such a revelation with an honest heart, and with integrity of disposition, willing to admit of a reasonable conviction, and willing to do sincerely whatever he shall find to be the will of God, however contrary it may be to his vicious affection or interest, let him be the judge.

In discoursing on this subject, I will more largely explain, what condition and qualifications our Saviour requires in a person who would rightly judge concerning his doctrine, whether it be of God or not, namely, that a man should first *do* his will, *i. e.* the will of God, and in conclusion will draw some useful inferences, which if you will but observe

in the future conduct of your lives will prove a blessing to you.

It was to the Jews our Saviour spake, and therefore with respect to them his meaning was, that they should be properly qualified to pass a right judgment upon christianity, by conforming themselves and their actions to the rule of that religion they had already embraced. For he readily agreed with them, that Moses and the Prophets were messengers by whom God spake at sundry times, and in divers manners to their fathers. And if they were the true disciples of those ancient teachers, if they sincerely received the law and the holy oracles delivered by them, and walked according to their direction uprightly, they might then be able to discern whether the gospel which he taught was accompanied with sufficient evidence of a divine original. But if instead of sincerely obeying their precepts they only professed to do so, *that* could not qualify them for a right judgment. Neither Moses nor the Prophets laid any stress upon external conformity only, nor was their doctrine rightly understood, if that was supposed to be the fulfilling of it.

The first and great commandment of the law, which the Jews also confessed, was “to love
“ the

“ the Lord God with all their heart, and
 “ with all their soul, and with all their mind;”
 and the second was like unto it, “ thou shalt
 “ love thy neighbour as thyself*.” And the
 substance of what God required by his pro-
 phets, “ was to do justly and to love mercy,
 “ and to walk humbly with God†.” This
 was declared in the Old Testament to be bet-
 ter than sacrifice, and the fear of God and
 obedience to his precepts more valuable than
 burnt-offerings and all ceremonial observ-
 ances. Here then was the defect of the
 Jews, which principally occasioned their dis-
 belief of christianity. They contended ear-
 nestly for the punctual observance of the ce-
 remonious injunctions of the law, they were
 perpetually talking about their religion, and
 boasting how much more religious they were
 than other people, even to the tithing of mint,
 anise, and cummin most exactly, and added
 traditions of their own; but they neglected
 faith, judgment, mercy, and the love of God,
 and the weightier matters of the law‡. They
 indulged themselves in pride, covetousness,
 and other vices which so hardened their
 hearts, and darkened their understandings,

* Matt. xxii. 37. 39.

† Micah, vi. 8.

‡ Matt. xxiii. 23.

that

that they could not perceive, and would not assent to the truths proposed to them. But though this was spoken to the Jews, and the qualification required in them for judging of the truth, and divine authority of the Christian doctrine was doing the will of God as revealed by Moses, and the Prophets, yet it holds equally with respect to all others; that obeying sincerely a formerly acknowledged revelation will best prepare them for judging of a new one, whether it be real or not, and that even they who never had any, by doing what the light of nature discovers to be the will of God, are in the best condition, indeed in the only sure way, to know a doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether the teacher speaks of himself.

It is certain that God manifests himself to all mankind by the light of nature and reason. This is his original voice, whereby we are taught the first principles of religion, his being, his perfections, his providence, and the homage and obedience we owe to him. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and "the firmament sheweth his handy work. "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night "unto night sheweth knowledge*." All

* Psalm xix. 1, 2.

nature cries aloud there is a God, and none, who justly considers the works around him, can deny it. And men are not only instructed by the works of God in the first principles of religion, but he has also engraven in their hearts a sense of good and evil, and written in them the word of his law to the rectitude of which their consciences bear witness. This is the original foundation of religion laid in the frame of our nature. It is as much as any thing can be the voice of God. And being that which is the first and most clearly known to us, it is the rule whereby all doctrines said to be of God, are to be examined, and nothing received as such, which is found upon a true examination to be contrary to it.

Now if this be so, it follows that they who do the will of God as made known to them by the light of nature, shall know a doctrine that is of God, and distinguish between it and that which falsely pretends to that character, just in the same manner, and for the same reason, that they who sincerely obey a former true revelation are best qualified to judge of a latter one. In the one case the honest mind receives the new divine doctrine because it is agreeable to what he was already satisfied God had revealed. In the other because he perceives

ceives it agreeable to what, his reason had before fully assured him, was the will of God. And in both cases it is the corrupt affections of men, as a law leading them into captivity to sin, which cause them to rebel against the light that makes manifest their evil deeds, or occasions their unbelief. Nor can we reasonably doubt but the declaration of our Saviour in the text was intended by him to be understood in this extensive sense. For he knew and designed that his gospel should be preached not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles, who never before had any positive revelation. Therefore the character and qualification he gives us of those who should rightly understand and sincerely embrace it, may be universally applied to all hearers. Indeed St. Peter observes, "that God is no respecter
 " of persons, but in every nation he that fear-
 " eth him, and worketh righteousness is ac-
 " cepted with him*." and thus from the same expression, it may be deduced that he who doth his will, shall know of a doctrine, said to be of God, whether it be really so.

Again, we may consider this in another view equally advantageous, that doing the

* Acts x. 34.

will of God is a qualification so acceptable to him, that it will entitle men to hope for further illumination and instruction from him in matters of so great necessity and importance. For let but a man live and perform his duty to the best of his knowledge with an honest heart, with integrity of mind, and with a clear conscience, and the holy spirit of God will instruct him in what is further necessary to salvation. He cannot be wrong. God is a God of justice, he is a God of mercy, and will not require more from any man than he has given; let a man have but an honest heart, and integrity of life to the best of his knowledge, and God will not require more than he is able to pay. He gives to all his living creatures that which is convenient for them, "he opens his hands liberally, and they are filled with good *." So too all valuable and useful knowledge is derived from God, as its original author. All are taught of God †, for there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding ‡.

Much more may we justly attribute to him, the wisdom which is necessary to men's moral conduct, upon which their highest happi-

* Psalm civ. 28.

† John vi. 45.

‡ Job xxxii. 8.

ness depends, and which is most worthy of him to bestow. Especially his assistance will not be wanting to those who do his will, that they may know the characters of a revelation from himself, since that must be supposed to be of the greatest moment and most important consequences towards their receiving or rejecting it. For it can never be imagined that God would interpose in an extraordinary manner, to make his will known to mankind without intending some great benefit to them, and conveying some very necessary instruction. And the same goodness which moved him to reveal himself at all, would determine him to favour them with those aids, whereby they should be rendered capable of understanding it. Now of all men they are most likely to be distinguished with the privilege of receiving further instruction from God, who have duly improved in practice the knowledge they have already attained, and have faithfully done the will of God as far as they understood it. So that we may consider the words of the text, as containing an actual promise to sincere well disposed persons, to the lovers of true piety and virtue, "That God will certainly teach them so far as is

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" abso-

“absolutely necessary, and that they shall
“never fatally err for not understanding a
“particular point of doctrine:” for what
God intends men should thoroughly understand and perform is written as it were with a sun-beam. Of their express duty no one can be ignorant. And this is what our notions of the supreme Being naturally lead us to believe, and what revelation has confirmed. I proceed now to draw from these observations some inferences, that if not straightway forgotten when you leave this holy temple, may by the blessing of God be of use to you in all your future life.

First then, hence learn that we are by no means required to search into the inexplicable mysteries of religion, nor are we to lose ourselves in the intricate mazes of speculation. We are not to quarrel or dispute with our neighbour about this or that point of opinion, for we are commanded, “as much as possible to live peaceably with all men*.” At the great and solemn day of decision before the tribunal of God, the question will not be, were you of this sect or of that,—were you of this persuasion or of that,—but what good

Rom. xii. 18.

have

have you done*? What life have you led? Have you lived according to the best of your knowledge? Have you lived a holy virtuous life? Have you performed the moral duties according to your faith? For these are the grand important points. We ought therefore as soon, and as ably as we can, to make ourselves thorough masters of our clear and expressed duty, and then God will instruct us in what we ought to know. We should endeavour also to inform our neighbours with simplicity and candidness, and then in every particular should endeavour to perform what we know to be reasonable, just, merciful, and virtuous. If our neighbour differ with us in opinion, let us endeavour to set him right by exhibiting to him the plain declarations of scripture; but let us not proceed to nice or doubtful disputations, let us by no means anger him, for says the Redeemer of mankind, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Besides, God who seeth the heart will know how far to punish or to pardon. He alone is the judge. Let us, and let our neighbour act according to the best of

* Matt. xxv. 31, &c.

our knowledge and belief, and neither of us can be fatally wrong; for if any man does the will of God, as far as he knows and can do, him God will further instruct in such doctrine as is necessary to his salvation.

Another inference is, that we should always pay an inviolable regard to the will of God, *i. e.* to the weightier matters of his law, in which all good men are agreed, and make it a rule in judging of religious truth. Should any new opinions be offered to your consideration, then reflect, that whatever has a necessary connexion with justice, and mercy, and honesty, and the love of God, and a direct tendency to promote them, that may safely be received, but whatever has no relation to them is not of importance, and whatever has a contrary tendency ought to be rejected. Judging by this rule a great many doctrines which have been taught in some christian churches are no otherwise to be accounted of than as "clouds without water, or as stubble carried about by winds*." What notion can any man have of the will of God, who imagines it amply

* Jude xii.

fulfilled by forms and ceremonies, by an over-pretended sanctity, and by always merely talking about it? What connexion have these things with moral goodness and "holiness" without which no man can see the Lord," or with that purity of manners, which alone can entitle us to the reward obtained for us by the merits and atonement of Christ? They are pernicious and everfive of the very foundation, when substituted in the room of it; and so are things of a better character and original, even all the instrumental parts, or positive ceremonies of religion, when they are substituted in the stead of solid piety and virtue,—in the stead of that faith in the merits of Christ, which produces righteousness, temperance, and charity. These then are the doctrines which we have for many years maintained in this place, they are the doctrines, which upon a candid and serious review will be found in the holy scriptures, and such are the doctrines of the church of England which we profess.

To conclude, if we would make a proficiency in the most useful knowledge, and in the discernment of religious truth, let us be diligent in the practice of our duty, so far

faras we already understand it, and thus "if
 " we follow on to know, we shall know
 " the Lord." The apostle speaks of a kind
 of knowledge which puffeth up, but cha-
 rity edifieth*. By charity we make the best
 and surest progress in true christianity. It is
 not always the greatest genius, nor the most
 penetrating judgment, that understands reli-
 gion best. Some men of the most eminent
 abilities are the most subtle defenders of er-
 ror, when their minds are under the power of
 corrupt affections. Thus the apostle accounts
 for the apostacy of christians, and experience
 justifies his account†. " Men are drawn away
 with the deceits of the world, because they re-
 ceived not the love of truth, and are aban-
 doned to the efficacy of error to believe lies,
 because they had pleasure in unrighteous-
 ness." But an honest heart sound in God's
 statutes, shall know the truth, and the truth,
 saith the apostle shall make them free‡. The
 psalmist says, " Fear the Lord, all ye his
 " saints, for they that fear him lack nothing§." and in the words of the Royal Preacher,
 " Fear God, and keep his commandments||,"
 for that is the sum and substance of religion.

* 1 Cor. viii. 7.

§ Psalm xxxiv. 9.

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 † 2 Thel. ii. 10, 11.
 || Eccles. xii. 13.

‡ John viii. 32.

